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ABSTRACT

In many ways young people appear to be using and abusing alcohol as a ritual in their "rites of passage" to adulthood, perhaps as a symbolic means to demonstrate their "adultness." Anthropologists have documented the importance of rites of passage rituals for marking the successful passage from one position in a social structure to another. Rites of passage include the three phases of separation, transition, and reaggregation. There are many rituals, some formalized and common throughout this culture and others common within certain subcultures and ethnic groups and still others less formal or only practiced within certain subgroups. This culture has had a tendency to decrease the observation of rites of passage rituals. Sanctioned initiation rituals can provide increased satisfaction, dedication and persistence among students completing their education, and can also benefit the system by reducing the number of unsanctioned, dangerous, addictive rituals that are required of new students by upperclass students. Counselors face the challenges of finding or devising appropriate and rigorous rituals that will permit youth to demonstrate and prove their worthiness to be considered and accepted as members of the adult world without resorting to dangerous addictive and debilitating ritual activities. The evidence suggests that greater benefits and fewer problems accrue from these endeavors than is being accomplished with the current attempts to prohibit all kinds of initiation rituals during the rites of passage period of youth. (ABL)

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Initiations Revisited: Improving Students' Adjustment and Persistence with Sanctioned Rites of Passage Rituals

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Introduction and Purpose

At the outset I want to indicate that this session is intended to raise questions and to challenge your thinking about the role or roles that initiations, rituals and rites of passage play in our society and culture, and for us to begin to conjecture how we might use this information as we attempt to help our students in their transitions through school (e.g. from junior high school to high school to college) and their movement from childhood to adulthood.

Background

As a teacher, school counselor, counselor educator, college administrator, and now a counselor educator again, I have pondered the meaning and implications of the problems of alcohol and other drug abuse and premarital sexual activity by our young persons, particularly those in high school and entering college, and to some extent by our society at large. Alcohol use and abuse in our culture and society has been receiving extensive attention for over a century and a half. Indiscriminate sexual activity has received attention forever, but certainly increased emphasis has been given to it in the last 5 years, with the emergence of AIDS and related diseases.

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More recent concerns with alcohol have been focused on the use and abuse by adolescents and young adults, the age group with whom most of us work, are preparing persons to work or have some concerned. Increased emphasis on education and legislation have not seemed to have a significant impact in reducing the numbers of persons involved nor the seriousness of many of problems that have been emerging with alcohol use and abuse. To be sure, education and legislation are necessary, but they clearly have not been enough to reverse the trends. Concerns with the HIV and AIDS are also focusing on younger persons, although it does not appear that the same amount of federal and state dollars are being invested for education or efforts directed toward legislation for those issues as is being done for alcohol.

A Reappraisal

In view of the persistence of these societal issues, it seems appropriate to consider another way of conceptualizing the nature of these issues. Rather than to just charge ahead with doing more

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and more of the same, hoping additional "units" of what we are doing will finally make a difference, it seems prudent to take a step back and try another view.

As one thinks about these issues it is a small step to think about the "ritualism" that seems to be associated with alcohol usage (and to some extent other drugs as well) and to casual sexual activity. Although little has been written about this ritualism aspect of alcohol use and sexual activity specifically, in many ways, young persons appear to be using and abusing alcohol as a ritual in their "rites of passage" to adulthood, perhaps as a symbolic means to demonstrate their "adultness".

In order to consider whether there is some cultural component to these problems, it seems prudent as good researchers to learn as much as we can from our anthropology friends. So, I have tried to learn as much as I could about rites of passage, and the rituals that might be associated with them. The result has been that I have developed a new appreciation for the important role that rituals play in our lives. This has led me to conjecture that perhaps we could be using this information in constructive ways to help our students as they move through school, to college and toward adulthood. What started out as a concern with the apparent use and abuse of alcohol and premarital sexual activity, has led me in the direction of looking at the broader area of rites of passage rituals and how we might use this knowledge and information in helping our students to increase their positive involvement in our schools and colleges, and to develop a sense of belongingness and commitment to our institutions. These factors have been shown to be important in student retention and student satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1977).

Initiation Rituals

It has been reported that persons who submit to rigorous rites of passage rituals develop a strong allegiance and commitment to the social group requiring the completion of initiation rituals (Kett, 1977; Kottak, 1987; Leemon, 1972). If this is true, then it might follow, if schools, colleges and universities could design and carry out rigorous and effective initiation programs, the dedication and persistence of their student body might be improved. It is also contended that appropriate institutionally sanctioned rigorous initiation rituals for new students could (would) reduce the number of incidents of unauthorized dangerous rituals that are required and implemented by upper class students at each educational level outside the jurisdiction and sanction of the institution.

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Thus, two major benefits of sanctioned initiation rituals are being proposed: 1. increased satisfaction and persistence by students in completing their current level of education and 2. reduced numbers of unsanctioned dangerous addictive rituals that are required of new students by upper class students.

It appears from a cursory perusal of the current literature that most schools and colleges do not now structure a formal initiation process for new students, other than structured orientation sessions and activities to help students get acquainted with each other and the institution's facilities, faculty, staff and services. Little, if anything, appears to be done by most institutions to help their new students to demonstrate and prove their worthiness to be students at their new school, college or university.

It will be my contention that we might increase our new students' sense of identification with and belongingness to our institutions (and subsequently increase the rate of retention of those who tend to become disenchanted with the institution) and decrease the incidents of unsanctioned dangerous initiation rituals by designing and implementing appropriately rigorous and demanding initiation rituals for our new students which would help them to formally recognize their passage to a new position in our society (Butler, 1990a; 1990b).

Before I say more about this, I will review, briefly, from an anthropological perspective, the concept of rituals as related to rites of passage, describe the characteristics of rites of passage and comment as to how I believe these relate to us and the students with whom we work.

Rituals and Rites of Passage

Rites of passage were first identified by a Belgium Anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep (1909, 1960) at the beginning of the twentieth century. He observed "that certain kinds of rituals around the world had similar structures. These were rituals associated with the movement, or passage, of people from one position in the social structure to another: births, initiations, confirmations, weddings, funerals, and the like" (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990, p. 177). These observations led then, to the concept of rites of passage.

Some definitions of rituals and rites of passage as used by anthropologists may be instructive.
Rituals are behavior that is formal, stylized, repetitive, stereotyped, and performed earnestly as a social act (Oswalt,

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1986, p. 380). It is behavior that is symbolic, and has a predefined, sequential nature which is generated by a specific set of ideas or reasons (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990, p. 176).

Because rituals are actions (or behaviors), it is important to pay attention to the way the ritual is actually carried out, as well as to the text (the particular sequential ordering of acts, utterances and events) that the ritual is to follow. The purpose of performing rituals is to help make the ideas of a culture concrete, to take on a form and to give direction to the group of participants. Our understanding of the world does not come merely from mind, but rather from a coming together of mind, emotion and body (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990, p. 177).

Some examples or rituals are:

Children's birthday parties
Scientific experiments
College graduation ceremonies
Procedures in courts of law
Preparations baseball hitters follow before stepping in the batter's box
Pledge nights in fraternities
Bridal showers
Weddings
Bar or bat mitzvahs
Catholic Mass
(Schultz and Lavenda, 1990, p. 177)

Rites of passage are "...rituals associated with the movement, or passage, of people from one position in the social structure to another..." (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990, p. 177), such as from childhood to adulthood.

Rites of passage are characterized by three (3) phases:

Separation phase - "Comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both" (Turner, 1969, p. 94). It involves "separation from the old position and from normal time, in which the ritual passenger leaves behind symbols and practices of his or her previous position" (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990, p. 177).

Examples: Moving to a new community
Going to a new school
Changing churches
Going away to college

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Pledging a fraternity/sorority organization
Joining a fraternal or secret society (Masons, Elks, PEO, Shriners)
Induction into military

Transition, marginal or "liminal" phase - "During the intervening 'liminal' period the characteristics of the ritual subject (the passenger) are ambiguous; he (she) passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner, 1969, p. 94). "...the ritual passenger is neither in his (her) old life or in his (her) new one. This period is marked by rolelessness, ambiguity and perceived danger. It is often a period in which the person or persons involved are subjected to ordeal by those who have already passed through" (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990, p. 177).

Persons in this phase are subjected to a "grinding down" process which is accomplished by "ordeals" such as "hazing, endurance of heat or cold, impossible physical tests in which failure is greeted by ridicule, unanswerable riddles which make even clever candidates look stupid, followed by physical punishment, and the like. But reducing down overlaps with reconstruction. The rebuilding process is by instruction, partly in practical skills, partly in tribal esoterics (learning the group's private teachings or secrets) and proceeds both by verbal and nonverbal symbolic means" (Turner, V. in Moore S. and Myerhoff, 1977, p. 37-38). It is through these initiation rites that "the liminaries are humbled and leveled to make them fit for a higher status or state.... Humbling and submission to ordeal, whether inflicted by self or others, goes with preparation for elitehood..." being rebuilt into something new, becoming a member in full standing and assuming a position in the new group (Turner, V. in Moore and Myerhogg, 1977, p. 38-39).

Examples: New students wearing name tags
Comprehensive exams
Course Pre-tests
Orientation events (freshmen wear distinguishing clothing)
Pledgeship periods for fraternities and sororities
Basic training - dress alike, look alike

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Comparison of liminality and normal social structure

Liminality	Normal Social Structure
transition	state
homogeneity	heterogeneity
communitas	structure
equality	inequality
anonymity	names
absence of property	property
absence of status	status
uniform dress	dress distinctions
sexual continence or excess	sexuality
minimization of sex distinctions	maximization of sex distinctions
absence of rank	rank
humility	pride
disregard of personal appearance	care for personal appearance
unselfishness	selfishness
total obedience	obedience only to superior rank
sacredness	secularity
sacred instruction	technical knowledge
silence	speech
simplicity	complexity
acceptance of pain and suffering	avoidance of pain and suffering

(Turner, 1969)

Reaggregation or reincorporation is the third phase and involves the ritual subject or passenger being reintroduced to society, but in his or her new position. "The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more, and by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-a-vis others of a clearly defined and 'structural' type; he (or she) is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents or social position in a system of such positions" (Turner, 1969, p. 95). The passage is completed.

Based on the above definitions, it is easy to see that we have many rituals, some formalized and common throughout our culture, others common within certain subcultures and ethnic groups and still others less formal and less common or only practiced within select subgroups. More important, perhaps, is the observation that rituals continue to be important as a means of defining who we are and giving meaning to us within our society.

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The tendency within our culture has been to decrease the observance of rites of passage rituals. Those that had been in existence, such as high school initiations and college initiations seemed to become quite dangerous, and in some instances, serious injury and even death were reported to have occurred inn a few instances. The usual response to these tragedies has been to outlaw the events and forbid the students (and/or their organizations) from engaging in such rituals in the future.

Although it was probably important that greater control over the rituals occur, it may have been unfortunate and even unwise for the institutions to have disallowed any future instances of rituals to be required as a part of the passage of students from one position in our culture to another position. As indicated earlier the evidence suggests that it is important to have these points of demarcation or rites of passage, and if the culture does not provide approved rituals as a part of the normal and usual passage process, then the persons whose status is about to be disrupted because of the introduction of new members into their midst may, and frequently do, design their own rituals for the "passengers" to accomplish before they will be fully accepted into the next order or position within the society. Thus, even though rituals have been formally banned, usually in the interest of safety and to limit liability, rituals are still devised and implemented outside the control and jurisdiction of the formal structure of the culture, such as the college or university.

The Proposal

The thesis of this presentation is that the evidence suggests that it is extremely important for there to be some type of significant ritual or event to mark the passage of persons from one position in our culture to another, especially during the childhood to adulthood transition. And, if the culture does not provide for such rites to be required within the approved rituals of the culture, or perhaps even worse, tries to restrict or prohibit them, there still are attempts by some persons to pressure and/ or require those who are seeking passage to the new position to submit to ordeal anyway. It is these rituals that are required outside the bounds and jurisdiction of responsible persons within the culture that end up being very injurious and damaging. Examples would include the requirement that individuals drink inordinate amounts of alcoholic beverages, engage in sexual exploits, and/or commit some other illegal activity, all of which potentially have very negative long term effects.

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Implications

The implications are that intuitively, at least, there is a need for persons who are moving from one position in our society to another to have some way to demonstrate their worthiness to assume the new position and there is a need of members within the society to have persons seeking new positions to demonstrate their worthiness to assume a new role and new responsibilities.

We must recognize that education and legislation are probably necessary but not sufficient. We need to acknowledge as a culture that we truly want to do something about the problems of alcohol use and abuse. We need to understand better the role(s) that rites of passage play in a society. And, we must earnestly seek to develop meaningful rituals to assist in defining the movement from childhood to adulthood.

A critical issue may be whether we remove the source of the problem or treat the consequences. We as individuals, as society as a whole can continue to spend our time throwing life buoys to persons who are already in trouble or go up stream to divert the persons from falling in the river in the first place. This might be done by assisting young persons to design appropriately rigorous experiences to demonstrate their adultness without resorting to peer and self designed rituals that end up having serious permanent negative consequences.

Without finding other appropriately challenging sanctioned rites of passage rituals, it is likely that alcohol abuse will continue because it meets several important characteristics of the liminal phase. A listing of some of these follows:

Selected characteristics of liminal phase:	Characteristics of alcohol use:
ambiguousness	dulling of senses
rolelessness	unable to assume responsibility
hazing	consuming excessive quantities
endurance of heat and cold	attempting to match bravado perceived of adults
impossible physical feats	attempting dangerous challenges
encouraging violation of previous standards and values	pressure to drink to be part of group

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Disadvantages for use of alcohol as a ritual in rite of passage include:

1. Addictiveness--has potential to create subsequent dependence on and abuse of alcohol
2. Increased tendency to use and abuse harder drugs
3. Physical effects--persons injure themselves, others, and property. Increase medical, liability and related costs.
4. Emotional impact--injures or destroys relationship and trust
5. Mental consequences--injures brain cells, confused mental functioning, impaired judgement

Alcohol is being used regularly by persons at younger and younger ages, some as young as 3rd or 4th graders, 8 or 9 years old--prior to an age of emotional and physical maturity, with increasing evidence of emotional and physical impairment and even death.

Consistent with the increased concern about alcohol use and abuse has been numerous solutions to abate or control the problems associated with alcohol use and abuse. These can be classified as follows:

1. Abolition - Enact laws against use, enforce the laws, punish the offenders.
2. Education - Voluntary compliance due to knowledge of dangers of use and misuse.
3. Legalization - Make alcohol easily available, reduce its mystic, teach responsible use. (Jaschik, 1990).

Clearly there are challenges to be faced in inventing new rituals. Some of these may be:

1. the broad age range of youth in the transition phase.
2. instant communication (a lack of isolation).
3. plurality of culture and society.
4. decrease in universal traditions.
5. demise of identifiable nuclear group.
6. finding rituals that are universally available.
7. designing consequences for those who do not participate.

The challenges we face, based on an understanding of the importance of rites of passage, are to find or devise appropriate and rigorous rituals that will permit youth to demonstrate and prove their worthiness to be considered and accepted as members of the adult world without resorting to dangerous addictive and permanently debilitating ritual activities. The evidence suggests that greater benefits and fewer problems accrue from these endeavors than is being accomplished with the current

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attempts to prohibit all kinds of initiation rituals during the rites of passage period of youth.

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